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*A REVIEW
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HUME AND HUXLEY
ON
MIRACLES*

SIR EDMUND BECKETT

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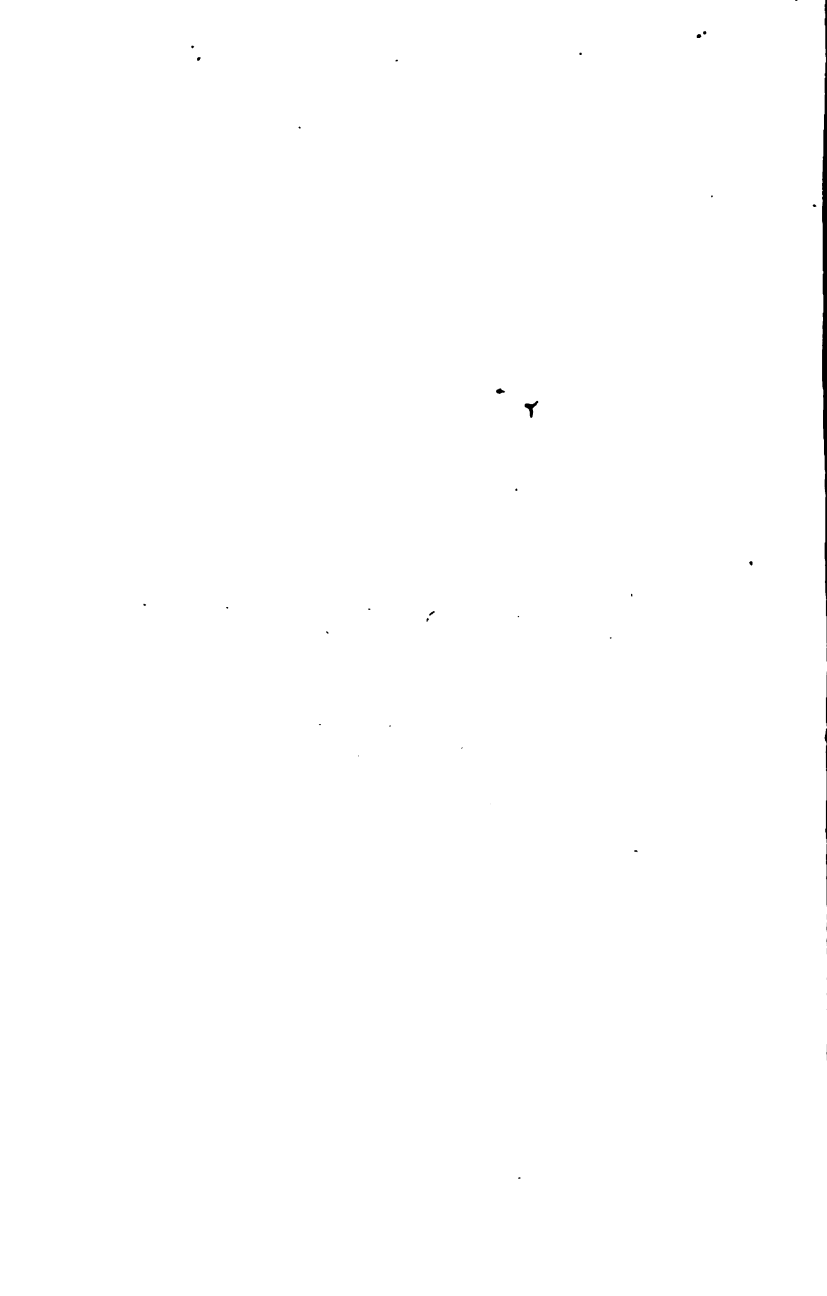
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A REVIEW
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HUME AND HUXLEY ON MIRACLES.

THE restatement of Hume's well-known argument against Miracles, with corrections and improvements by so eminent a natural philosopher as Professor Huxley, in his book entitled 'Hume,' seems to require a more express answer than it has received, so far as I can learn. That part of the book was indeed noticed shortly in some of the Reviews of the time; and it may be that all the arguments contained in it had been answered substantially by anticipation in other books, and especially in Dean Mansel's essay on Miracles in the 'Aids to Faith'—a volume full of valuable information and reasoning on most of the subjects of the once famous 'Essays and Reviews.' But Dr. Huxley's chief argument had not then been so specifically stated, though it was suggested in substance by Babbage forty years before. Moreover, any such treatise by the President of the Royal Society may be assumed to be the best that science can furnish on that side; and scientific objections are thought more of just now than evidential.

It will be seen too, that on one or two points, and even in the definition of a miracle, he flatly contradicts Hume, and even charges him with absurdity, though where they agree he exalts him as a 'specialist' in that kind of learning, and adopts the same conclusion. So we must first clear the ground by seeing which has the best of it where they differ, and then deal with the conqueror, and with them both where they agree. Occasionally it will be necessary to notice other objections not specifically made by them, but so logically connected with theirs that they ought to be answered at the same time.

Dr. Huxley states 'the essential argument of Hume's 'famous disquisition on Miracles' accurately enough as follows, though not exactly in his own words: 'It 'must be admitted to be a reasonable request if we ask 'those who would have us put faith in the actual 'occurrence of interruptions of the order of nature, to 'produce evidence in favour of their view, not only 'equal but superior in weight to that [evidence] which 'leads us to adopt ours' (p. 130). This he pronounces irrefragable; and so it is in the abstract; but we on the other hand have to see how much real evidence they have against miracles. Then he adds, beginning immediately to contradict his leader, 'Hume has surrounded the kernel of his essay with a shell of very 'doubtful value. . . . Argumentation whether miracles 'are possible, and if possible, credible, is merely beating the air until the arguers have *agreed* what they 'mean by the word Miracle. Hume, with less than

‘his usual perspicacity, but *in accordance with the common practice of believers* in the miraculous, defines ‘a miracle as a violation of the laws of nature by a particular volition of the Deity.’ And be it remembered that Hume did believe in a Deity, *i.e.* in a personal, designing Creator; for he wrote, ‘The whole frame of nature bespeaks an intelligent author; and no rational inquirer can, after serious reflection, suspend his belief a moment with regard to the primary principles of genuine theism and religion.’ Dr. Huxley quotes this himself in another chapter, and then tries to explain it away by virtue of some other words which Hume puts into the mouth of one of the interlocutors in an imaginary dialogue.

We are not concerned however with the amount of Hume’s belief, but only with his arguments, and perhaps a little with the fairness of his commentator, and more just now with his logic. Dr. Huxley says a little farther on, ‘The definition of a miracle as a violation of the laws of nature is in reality an employment of language which on the face of the matter can not be justified. For Nature means nothing more nor less than that which is; the sum of phænomena presented to our experience; the totality of events, past, present, and to come:’—a very important definition from such a philosopher, and deserving to be more borne in mind than it generally is by those of his own school, who fancy that they are demolishing a Creator by using ‘Nature’ for a prime cause, instead of the consequence of all causes. And there is a good deal

more of similar fault-finding with Hume's definition of miracles as violations of the laws of nature.

But whether that definition is wrong or right in the abstract, or for some purposes, it is astonishing that Dr. Huxley should be actually condemning Hume for having done the very thing which he says he ought to have done, viz., using the word in its 'agreed' sense and 'according to the common practice' of those whom he was undertaking to confute. It is very true that it is only 'beating the air' for a new arguer (as Hume was then) to use the fundamental word of any discussion in a different sense from that of his opponents. But who then is the beater of the air here? Not Hume, who did use the word in the common sense, but his corrector, who uses it in a new one of his own; which could lead to nothing but confusion, even if he were etymologically right in saying 'the primitive and legitimate sense' of a Miracle is 'something wonderful.' But he is wrong there too. He has no less strangely forgotten that the New Testament was not written in English, or in Latin either; and that although 'miracle' is the English of 'miraculum,' which does mean 'something wonderful,' it is the conventional translation there of three Greek words, of which only one, *τέρατα*, means 'wonders;' and that is very seldom used alone, without either *σημεῖα* or *δυνάμεις*, which respectively there mean *signs*—of divine interference and exhibitions of *power*, i.e. divine power, sometimes also called 'mighty works'; both of which it would be mere nonsense to apply to the effects of the

regular or physical laws of nature. The very first miracle of Jesus, the turning of water into wine, is called the 'beginning of signs,' σημεῖον, by which he 'manifested forth his glory' (John ii. 11); which was plainly meant for supernatural; whether the evangelist was right or wrong in taking it to be so, or Dr. Huxley in taking it to be—nobody knows what. Consequently it would be as wrong as possible to translate those words by any modern ones that only mean *miracula* in the etymological sense, and not 'miracles' in the universally agreed theological sense. That is not a fortunate opening of his case by our new demonstrator of the impossibility of miracles.

I used the phrase 'physical laws of nature' just now, to distinguish what everybody else understands by the 'laws of nature' from the new meaning given to 'nature' (as well as 'miracles') by Dr. Huxley; who says that 'Nature includes everything that is; the 'totality of events, past, present, and to come'; in short, to distinguish natural causes from supernatural, in the ordinary sense of those words; for it is at any rate possible that there may be both, and quite impossible to prove that there are not. In fact, the real question in all this discussion is, whether there are supernatural causes or not? Dr. Huxley's definition of Nature certainly settles that point very simply; for there is clearly no room in the universe for anything 'supernatural' if 'nature' includes everything that is or has been or ever will be. In other words, it is a definition which ingeniously begs the question in

terms which appear quite indisputable; but it is really a mere pointless truism, so far as it is anything beyond a bare assertion without any pretence of proof. Moreover, it is nothing to the purpose in an inquiry about causes, to say that nature is only the sum of all results, though that is true enough when you exclude the supernatural. But not one reader in a thousand will observe that distinction, and the other 999 will go on taking the words 'nature' and 'laws of nature' in their common physical sense, and yet take for granted that Dr. Huxley had made it quite clear that 'nature' includes everything, past, present, and future. And after it has served his turn in this non-natural sense, he uses it himself thenceforth in the natural, just as other people do.

Thus he says presently, 'No one who wishes to keep well within the limits of that which he has a right to assert, will affirm that it is impossible that the sun and moon should have been ever made to stand still, or that the walls of a city should fall at a trumpet-blast, or that water was turned into wine, because such events are contrary to uniform experience and violate *laws of nature*. For aught he can prove, such events may appear *in the order of nature* to-morrow.' Of course he means in the natural physical order of things, excluding all supernatural action. He quite rightly goes on to say: 'But common sense and honesty oblige him to demand . . . evidence at least as strong as that which a man who says he has seen a centaur is bound to produce.' In other words, all these things

would be demonstrable by *some* amount of evidence, as he admits that the existence of a centaur would, even without his seeing one himself; and of course *a fortiori* if he did see it. The world would then see that 'nature,' in the ordinary sense, was wider than any naturalist supposed. Lucretius, the favourite ancient philosopher of the modern advocates of spontaneous creation, had selected that animal as the type of a natural impossibility, as Dr. Huxley quotes:

'Nam certè ex vivo centauri non fit imago.'

But here is another fallacy. If a herd of centaurs were found somewhere in the world to-morrow, they would not logically affect the miraculousness of miracles the least. Though we have no idea now how they could live, we should then see; and it would be nonsense to question the naturalness of things which would then be as visibly a part of nature as a horse or a man. But no amount of seeing such miracles as those of the New Testament would show us how they were done, or bring us any nearer believing that the production of such results by the mere words of a very few men in the history of the world, and a vast number by one of them, including his own resurrection, was natural, or possible under the regular laws of nature. That is the question which Dr. Huxley has undertaken to solve. Yet all that he does with his centaur is to tell us that the credibility of the most apparently impossible event or phænomenon is a mere question of evidence; with which we entirely agree. But that has

no relation to the other and main question, of whether the cause of it was natural or supernatural. That has to be determined from the circumstances proved by the evidence; the credibility of which has to be judged *aliunde*. The existence of a centaur may be called as improbable or impossible as that six water-pots of water should somehow get turned into wine, or the walls of a city fall by prediction at the blast of certain trumpets. But no amount of evidence could persuade any rational man that the real sudden appearance in the world of a centaur *at the word of a man* was not a violation of the laws of nature by miraculous power belonging to that man, or acting at his invocation. That would be the true analogy of Dr. Huxley's centaur to the miracles of the Bible.

For if it is conceivable that those three 'wonderful events,' which he mentioned, might happen just when they were wanted, by some extraordinary natural coincidences, under the laws of nature, there is that other element in the actual history of all of them which I do not see how any man in his senses can believe to have been naturally possible; and that is the ordering of them and their immediately coming to pass. The common phrase of '*doing* miracles' makes us apt to forget that the '*doers*' of them did nothing, except speak, with a very few exceptions not worth noticing. And so we have not only got to imagine laws of nature which will allow all those wonderful and apparently impossible things to come, and just when they were wanted, but also just when they were ordered by the

words of a very few men, and especially one. If it is not nonsense to talk of that happening by any conceivable regular laws of nature (excluding the supernatural) I do not see what would be.

In discussing the causes of phænomena we must of course assume the history of them and their circumstances to be provisionally true, leaving the actual truth to be discussed on the sufficiency of the evidence to convince mankind: which is all that can be said of the evidence for any event or proposition that is not demonstrably or mathematically impossible, though in a very high degree improbable. Dr. Huxley might even have taken some better examples of scriptural events which were quite within the known laws and course of nature, and yet are called miraculous—and rightly so. Multitudes of people besides Korah, Dathan and Abiram and their families, have been swallowed up by earthquakes in all ages; and yet no other earthquakes have been called miracles. Why? Because that is the only one that is ever recorded to have happened at the bidding or the invocation of a man that it should come just then and swallow up exactly the persons that he indicated as offenders. Dr. Huxley may write for ever about the possibilities of nature, but he will never convince any man of common sense that, if the bare facts of that story are true, they happened under any conceivable laws of physical nature only, though of course they did happen under whatever laws or causes there are in the universe embracing 'all events, past, present, and future.'

The fact is that he has throughout confounded prodigies and miracles. According to the received sense of those words (which alone is worth attending to) a prodigy is a very unusual and perhaps unique natural phenomenon, such as a two-headed child, or (conceivably) a centaur; but a miracle may be an event as common as death, if it was attended with circumstances which could not happen under the regular laws of nature. Whatever made Ananias and Sapphira successively fall down dead at the words of Peter, it was quite impossible that he could naturally know that they would, any more than Moses in the case of Korah and all his company.

There are so few miracles, even in the Old Testament, which were not either ordered or predicted, that it is not worth while to notice them; and in the New Testament there are still fewer. The only attempt that I have ever seen to get over the connection between the bidding and the miracles is the audaciously absurd suggestion that though the event may have happened from some natural cause, the words connected with it were falsely, or by what is called 'a pious fraud,' invented long afterwards. Such suggestions only prove that no guess is too monstrous for their authors to expect other people to believe, rather than history and evidence which they do not like. If this is applied to the New Testament miracles, it means that in the time and presence of Jesus Christ, a vast number of people were naturally, but suddenly, cured of all sorts of ailments, some notoriously incurable, and all

incurable suddenly; and many other things done which everybody knows to be impossible by any natural means; and a few by the apostles: but that his and their presence had nothing to do with it; and as for the words they are alleged to have spoken in ordering the miracles, they were all invented to make a good set of stories afterwards, though quite within the memory of multitudes of people who must then have known that they were lies.

If such absurdity is worth answering, was it also an *ex post facto* invention that the Priests and Pharisees were so angry at these things being done, and many converts made by them, that they 'sought to kill Jesus,' and yet never thought of denying that they were done? Dr. Huxley does not adopt that ridiculous hypothesis, but I cannot call his own any better, that 'the intervention of' the doer of the miracles 'may have had no more to do with them than any 'other fortuitously coincident event' (p. 138). His only solution of the several resurrection miracles, which he rightly selects as the most important, is that not one of the raised persons was really dead. If so, and if every other miracle was as natural as an earthquake, such a number of 'fortuitous concurrences' between 'wonders' or 'signs' and the orders for them is about as probable as Lucretius's cosmogony by the fortuitous concurrence of atoms.

If the Resurrection cannot be explained away by the hypothesis of no real preceding death, Dr. Huxley would still rather believe that it and all the predictions

of it came from some natural causes than from supernatural, using both those words in their common sense, which he clearly does, notwithstanding his definition of 'nature' as including both if both exist. Well, that only proves that he is either guessing in the dark, as people often do in saying what they would or would not do in some imaginary case, or else that the power of judging between two only possible alternatives sometimes depends on idiosyncrasies of mind rather than on reason or on any intrinsic probabilities. An almost infinite majority of judges would think a predicted real death and resurrection about the strongest conceivable proofs of supernatural power and its exercise, and the ascription of them to any conceivable natural cause in the highest degree absurd. We cannot help Dr. Huxley's thinking otherwise. There can be no doubt that he does: for he clearly uses 'nature' in its common sense in this next important passage also, though it immediately follows his peculiar definition of it. 'Every event must be taken to be a *part of nature* until 'proof to the contrary is supplied; and such proof is 'from the nature of the case impossible.' Of course it is, if nature is 'the totality of events, past, present, and to come.' I am surprised however that he could put that sentence and the former one so close together, with the word 'nature' meaning such different things in each of them: in the latter, the result of all physical, regular causes; in the former, the result of *all* causes; which, for anything he knows or can prove, may include extra-physical, irregular, or what everybody

else calls 'supernatural' causes. But that is no new confusion of causes and consequences. Somewhere else he recommended Materialism as 'a good working theory.' So is gravity, a still better, for it does much more work. But neither of them is of the smallest use, nor has that sentence any meaning, when we are wanting to find out the prime causes of either gravity or of the universe and all events.

But though it is impossible, and nonsensical, to think of proving that any event is not 'a part of nature' in the new unlimited sense, I should like to be informed why it is 'impossible from the nature of the case' to prove that certain events were not and could not be 'a part of nature' in the old limited sense, of results due to physical or regular causes. He gives us no such information beyond his own assertion. If he means that it is impossible to give either mathematical or visible proof to that effect, no doubt that also is true. But he cannot himself give any such proof of the most undoubted scientific theories—and certainly not of the modern theory of the Conservation of Force being universal—but only proofs amounting to a very high degree of probability. And if there is that high degree of probability which is fairly called certainty, that a given event cannot have been caused by any regular laws of nature, there is the very same certainty that it was caused by supernatural power, if it really happened; and still more so, if the orderer of it, being a person of confessedly the highest moral character, said so. For surely the doer of the miracle knows

how he does it, and the only open question is whether he lies. Nor does it make any difference whether the miracle was ordered by the one person in all history who professed to do them by his own power, or by the few others who always professed not to be exercising their own power, but speaking 'in the name of Jesus Christ,' or with the knowledge that what they called the power of God or the Spirit of God would forthwith do the miracle. Those other persons probably knew no more than we do how that power acted upon matter to cause it to behave in that abnormal way, and it is idle and absurd to ask how it did or could; first, because it is impossible for us to know; and secondly, because the only question now is, Could the miracles, being what they were, and coming as they did to order, be 'a part of nature,' which the doers said they were not?

Dr. Huxley thinks he knows better than they did, and that he has refuted them, and indeed demolished the whole of revelation, by the dexterous use of a few words about Nature. Such feats are like children too clever to live. Even before any logical examination of them, we know that they must be paradoxes or ingenious pieces of mere verbal conjuring. The world is not so stupid as to have left a simple piece of decisive logic on so important a question undiscovered for 1800 years. They contain no newly-discovered result of science, nor indeed any science at all; Christianity would have been killed long ago, and even in its inception, if there were anything really deadly in weapons which could have been so easily forged and

used by any clever infidel,* from 'a certain orator named Tertullus' down to his most modern successor. I shall have to say a little more about Hume's famous paradox in his own words further on for another purpose. But for the present we will pass on to consider the more elaborate objections to the credibility of the New Testament miracles. It will be convenient to take a rapid survey of the several classes of them which we are required by Dr. Huxley's theory to ascribe to natural causes, if we cannot get rid of the evidence that they really happened from some cause or other.

Survey of the chief Miracles.

I suppose everybody agrees that the greatest apparent miracles are the spontaneous resurrection of Jesus himself, and the revival, by order, of several other

* Some writers of that school ask with professed indignation what right we have to call them Infidels, when Christians are called so in Turkey. Only the right of using words in England as everybody in England understands them: the very thing that Dr. Huxley says we ought to do in arguing, and which Hume did, but he himself does not. So everybody in England understands the word 'Atheist' to mean an unbeliever in a single God, though in Greek and thence in Latin use, it meant exactly the contrary. Therefore it is right so to use it now, though Dr. Huxley thinks not. I do not know how these gentlemen have acquired the right to change the English language, and to destroy certain words which everybody understands, merely because they dislike them. In like manner they tell us that Religion has nothing to do with a belief in God, because it may mean something else etymologically. We might as well tell them that they have no right to use 'gravity' for universal attraction, though every educated person understands it so. Such writing is mere folly, if it were not done for mischief and delusion.

dead persons, varying with the degree of certainty that they were actually dead, not taking it merely from the record that they were, but from all the attending circumstances. For example, the circumstances of the story of Eutychus do not absolutely prove that he was killed by his 'fall from the third loft,' though St. Luke says that he was (Acts xx. 9), and if other revivals really took place there is no special improbability in that one. So let us omit that case. There are five others in the New Testament involving various degrees of possible—or impossible—mistake as to the reality of the deaths, viz., Dorcas, who was raised by Peter (Acts ix.); the widow of Nain's son (Luke vii. 11), Jairus's daughter (Mark v. 35), and Lazarus (John xi.), all raised by Jesus; and greater than them all, the resurrection of Jesus himself. Moreover, they were all attended or preceded by either bidding or prophecy that they would take place at the time specified; not to mention prophecies of another class, as of the destruction of Jerusalem and other great cities.

Dr. Huxley's solution of the problem of all the resurrections is the very simple one that none of the persons raised were really dead. He does not say so directly, for that is not his way of arguing in these matters, though no writer is more direct and distinct and luminous in really scientific exposition. Here he only suggests conclusions which he does not actually state, and much less try to explain. He does this business by what lawyers call an *A. B. case*, which his readers are intended to apply by analogy to all the

recorded stories of resurrection, though it has clearly no analogy to the most striking of them all, as will be seen in a moment. He says, 'Suppose, for example, it is affirmed that A. B. died, and that C. D. brought him to life again.' (In Christ's resurrection there was no C. D.) 'Let it be granted that' (in short) there was every possible reason to believe that everybody told the truth as to the apparent facts. 'Would all this constitute even presumptive evidence that C. D. had worked a miracle? Unquestionably not. For the most important link in the whole chain of evidence is wanting, viz., proof that A. B. was really dead. The evidence of ordinary observers on such a point is absolutely worthless . . . unless careful thermometric observation proves that the temperature has sunk below a certain point; unless the cadaveric stiffening of the muscles has become well established; all the ordinary signs of death may be fallacious, and the intervention of C. D. may have had no more to do with A. B.'s restoration to life than any other fortuitous coincident event.'

Even this abstract statement is exaggerated, and therefore wrong; for there are plenty of deaths which the evidence of the most ordinary truthful spectators would prove more satisfactorily than the most scientific observation with thermometers, which may err. Take the very simple one of a man having been buried in the earth for some days, or being drowned for some hours; or evidently bled to death from some great and deadly wound; not to speak of still more extreme cases of

manifest destruction, less analogous to any of the New Testament resurrections. But if Dr. Huxley's abstract statement were ever so correct where there is no proof of death besides the appearance of the body, what is the use of it in any actual case where we have all the circumstances before us, assuming (as we must for this purpose) that they are truly recorded? General rules of that kind are only true so far as every actual case confirms them; and the moment any single case refuses to support it, the *general* rule is gone, or only sinks into an *usual* one; for 'general' is thus used in the mathematical sense of 'universal,' and it is not universal if it ever fails.

Now let us see the use of this professed rule in such a case as the story of Lazarus in John xi. 47, xii. 10. I cite the second text to remind you that his resurrection was at least so undoubted that the Jews sought to kill both him and Jesus for it. Moreover, he had been sick, and evidently thought dying, for some time; and yet Jesus waited two days after he heard that. And when he did go he said, 'I go to awake him . . . 'Lazarus is dead.' How could he possibly know by any human means that he was only in a trance—if he was? And when he got there, Lazarus 'had lain in the grave 'four days,' so that his sisters were convinced that it was impossible to revive him, even if Jesus could have done it sooner, or could have prevented him from dying, as some of the people thought, from previous experience, that he could; which is a strong incidental proof of his having done many previous miracles—unless they were

all natural accidental coincidences between the words of Jesus, and very extraordinary sudden cures from no visible cause at all; which is Dr. Huxley's theory. If anybody was ever dead, Lazarus was, before he was raised.

On this naturalistic hypothesis, they were carrying out and going to bury alive also the widow of Nain's son, and Jesus alone divined somehow that he was alive, and only wanted speaking to to make him get up from the bier; for he was not in a coffin, but quietly lying there to go and be buried, unless that story also is false altogether, and no such 'rumour of him went forth throughout all Judæa, and all the region round about' (Luke vii. 17). It is singular that Jesus himself should have been the person to say that Jairus's daughter 'is not dead, but sleepeth,' and that the 'people who were there' laughed him to scorn, knowing 'that she was dead' (Matt. ix. 24; Mark v. 40). That was at any rate a most unlikely story to invent, as it makes him appear to depreciate his own power. And again there is the same difficulty, that if she was in a trance he could not possibly know it by any natural means, and yet he said, 'she shall be made whole' before he saw her.

These are impossible enough on any naturalistic theory, but there are still greater difficulties in the case of Christ's own death, which Dr. Huxley will not believe to have been real 'unless careful thermometric observation proved that the temperature of the body had sunk below a certain point, or unless the cadaverous

'stiffening of the muscles had become well established.' Remarkably safe conditions to require now, and merely equivalent to another dogmatic assertion that Christ's death cannot possibly be proved, and therefore it is useless to argue about it: yet this is intended to pass for real argument and science.

I suppose he does not mean all that for a kind of suicidal *reductio ab absurdum*; and yet it amounts to saying that it is not certain that anybody was ever dead before being buried alive, until the invention of the thermometric test or the scientific examination for rigidity; and indeed hardly anybody since, for not one death in a million is tested in any such way. If Jesus had been beheaded, or burnt to ashes, these philosophers could as easily have told us that there is no proof now that some dead man or some other similarly condemned criminal had not been dexterously substituted for him. Nothing is too improbable for unbelievers to believe when necessary. But if we are to deal seriously with this old theory of an imperfectly killed Christ, let us see what it means; and perhaps this great professor of physiology will tell us of some similar case of a man being only mistaken for dead after being scourged, not merely '*scuticá*,' but (as commentators say was the practice) '*horribili flagello*,' and probably as much as they dared without disappointing the crucifixion by death; for he was unable to bear his cross; and either that treatment or something else caused him to be pronounced dead long before the usual time by those who thoroughly understood the

business of crucifixion and distinguished his condition from that of the two thieves; and secondly, after being pierced with a spear in a manner evidently mortal, if he was not dead already, and which is also said by the learned to indicate by the blood and water that the heart had been ruptured. Does Dr. Huxley seriously expect anybody else to believe, if he believes himself, that those who took down from the cross and had the subsequent handling of a body which had received all that treatment, could possibly be mistaken in being sure that it was dead, or would have buried him if they were not sure? It is useless to tell us of men having been left for dead on fields of battle or elsewhere, and afterwards taken up and wonderfully cured. They must have been wounded in the same way as this, and as deliberately taken for dead by those who were determined that they should be killed, before their case is any precedent for assuming that Christ was not dead. And though one or two criminals have been revived after being hung, that also is far short of this. Mere hanging is no mortal injury unless it is continued long enough; and in those cases it was not.

And there is another difficulty. If Jesus was not actually dead of his various wounds, no rational demander of scientific proofs can doubt that he was so weakened by them, and by having been nearly three days without food, by hanging on the cross, being pierced to the heart, and lying in the grave, that he would be unable to do anything. Yet he was not only able to get up and roll away the great stone from the

door of the sepulchre without disturbing any of the watching soldiers, but to come out, and appear immediately in perfectly good health to sundry people, and to take a long walk to Emmaus talking to two disciples, who for a good while did not recognise him : which last, by-the-bye, was a most unlikely thing for any evangelist or disciple to invent, because it added to the story an apparent difficulty for nothing.

Nor is the non-reality of his death all that has to be explained ; for if the gospels are not false in this also, Jesus so frequently predicted that he should be put to death, crucified, and rise again the third day, that the Jews took special precautions against any imposture in the resurrection : see Matt. xvii. 23, xx. 18 ; Mark ix. 31, x. 32 ; Luke ix. 31, xviii. 32 ; John ii. 19, iii. 14, xii. 34, which are by no means all versions of the same prediction ; and Matt. xxvii. 63, where the Pharisees and priests repeated it. If it be said that he knew he had provoked them so that they were likely to kill him some day, that made it the more unlikely that he should be judicially crucified by the Gentiles whom he had not provoked, and who at last only sentenced him to death unwillingly. Yet it was quite certain and notorious, both to his friends and his enemies, that he did predict that, and his resurrection on the third day after his death, unless the whole story of all the evangelists is false. The anti-miraculists have to make out how all that was possible by any laws of nature.

Till they do we may leave people to judge for them-

selves how far any of the resurrections can be disposed of as non-miraculous by Professor Huxley's dictum (p. 134) that 'no event is too extraordinary to be possible'—by nature. Of course *we* say also that no event is too extraordinary to be possible—by supernatural means or a miracle; which is just what he denies. Yet the only reason he gives for his denial is the assertion that no proof of the supernatural is possible 'from the nature of the case.' I have dealt with that in one way already, and I now add that such an argument is suicidal; for where proof of anything is possible in the nature of the case if the thing is true, the absence of proof is fatal; but if no proof is possible from the nature of the case, then the absence of such proof goes for nothing; and the thing may be either true or not, according to the best reasons we can find. If it has only one possible alternative, and that alternative is vastly more improbable, then the thing or cause in question is most highly probable, or what is popularly called 'certain;' *i.e.* we must feel certain of it: which is all that can be said of any law of nature or any scientific theory.

Turning now to the other kinds of miracles, the deniers of them have to explain how the unnumbered cures of 'all manner of diseases' were performed by Jesus by natural means, and came to be so universally believed both by his enemies and friends; and how 4000 and 5000 people were satisfied with food in the wilderness by a few loaves and fishes, and many basketfuls left over; and how a wedding party mistook

six water-pots of water for the best wine, besides the 'many other things which Jesus did,' too many for St. John to write. If all these can be credibly made out to have been conjuring, or the sick and blind and lame and dumb and mad people who were cured, to have been all shamming, or imagining they were cured, and making others think so too, let us see that theory worked out. Though the mode of doing some conjuring tricks is a secret, there has never been such conjuring as that. The miracles were not mere spectacles and appearances, but personal experiences, and far too numerous to be accounted for by any conjuring; besides the doers doing nothing except speak. And they differed from all the Popish miracles in that they convinced unwilling spectators that they were performed, including many whom they nevertheless did not convert into followers of Christ. Attributing the miracles to Beelzebub, and seeking to kill Jesus on account of them, were very sufficient proofs that they were done and could not be denied.

It is useless to pick out one or two miracles here and there, and suggest some just conceivable explanation for them, and then expect us to take for granted that the same can be done for all the rest. If the explanation is to be general, it must be on some theory that will explain them generally, or it is worth nothing. If it is meant to be of individual miracles, it applies only to them, and is not even a pretence of explaining the others: any more than we can infer that all ghost stories are explicable without ghosts because some are.

Here we have to account for a long series of at least apparent miracles, always joined with prophecies or bidding of them, sufficiently great and numerous and notorious to have produced a band of believers, who, on the strength of them alone, changed the face of the world, without any single advantage of position, and in spite of innumerable difficulties. That would be itself a miracle, being contrary to the course of nature, unless the original miracles were real.

Dr. Huxley says (p. 132) that 'a vast number of miracles have professedly been worked neither by the Deity nor by any invisible agent; but by Beelzebub or his agents, or very visible men.' There is a good deal of exaggeration in that statement, and a somewhat new theory of Beelzebub being a visible agent, and a part of physical nature, and professing to work miracles. But we need not stay to criticise all that. For if it were all true, and if Beelzebub or his agents did work miracles, how would that prove that the Deity could not or did not; or that there is no such thing as supernatural interference? It would only prove that there is, and would be an *a fortiori* case for divine miracles. But I suppose Dr. Huxley only means that these diabolical miracles were a pretence, or what we call conjuring. He does not even tell us what miracles he means. If so, again it is plainly worth nothing, or merely eliminates them altogether from the discussion, unless he can make out Christ's miracles to have been conjuring.

He or somebody else may possibly go on to say that,

after throwing off all the discovered or undiscovered impostures of modern 'spiritualism,' there remain phænomena which cannot be explained by any known laws of nature, but which nobody in his senses would call miracles in the theological sense. But what similarity is there in any of those phænomena to the Bible miracles? So far as I can learn, there is not a bit of real evidence of anything being revealed by the so-called spirits which was not already known to somebody; nor of any good being ever done by them, but a great deal of harm; so that, if really supernatural, they are diabolic; and if they belong to some recondite laws of nature they are not miracles at all. Indeed there is much better evidence for some other kinds of occasional prophesying than for that of 'spirits'; but none of any kind for the same person prophesying or ordering, and thereby causing, any extraordinary phænomenon; in short, none for anything like the miracles of the New Testament, supported by any testimony worth serious attention.

Dr. Huxley supplements his suggestion of the non-reality of the death of Christ, and all the others which were followed by a resurrection, with a little apologue, which he assures us is a historical coincidence as marvellous as those supposed miracles. He must have a very low estimate of the logical capacity of the readers for whom he provides such instruction, and I daresay he is right as to most of them. He tells the story of the earthquake which destroyed the English fortifications of Jellalabad on the 19th of February, 1842, and

how they were fortunately repaired before Akbar Khan attacked them; and then he says: 'If Akbar had 'happened to give orders for an assault on that 19th of 'February, what good follower of the Prophet could 'have doubted that Allah had lent his aid? As it 'chanced however, Mahometan faith in the miraculous 'took another turn; for . . . the enemy, finding no 'signs of the earthquake when they invested the place, 'ascribed the supposed immunity of Jellalabad to 'English witchcraft.' And there he discreetly stops, without attempting to explain how the miracles coming visibly when they were ordered were in the smallest degree analogous to that Indian earthquake coming naturally, and the absurd notions which the Affghans entertained about it in one case, and perhaps would have entertained in the other. I by no means suspect so clever a man as Dr. Huxley of himself believing in the inference which he clearly intends his readers to draw from such a story. He no doubt believes fully in the general conclusion, or guess, that the laws of nature are the supreme power of the universe, and very likely knows the kind of reasoning which will take with readers who cannot perceive differences and will accept any plausible analogy from an eminent man under the popular disguise of 'science.'

If we are asked how we distinguish the miraculous cures of the New Testament from Popish stories of cures of diseases, which nobody takes the trouble to disprove, and yet nobody believes except those who are already Papists, the answer is that they all fail

without any refutation, for want of sufficient evidence to overcome their improbability. Protestants are therefore satisfied already that they are impostures, and Papists are bound to believe that they are not; and so argument is useless. One of the peculiarities of the New Testament miracles is that they had such evidence as no other extraordinary events in the world ever had. Dr. Huxley elsewhere quotes Priestly, who was a strong Unitarian and a distinguished natural philosopher, for saying that of the Resurrection. I do not know exactly what he means by the somewhat loose expression, 'if it is undeniable that evidence of 'so complete and weighty a character is needed now for 'the establishment of such a wonder as that supposed, 'it has always been needful.' He has never said how complete or how weighty, and yet every thing turns on that. It must be weighty and complete enough to convince reasonable minds, of course; but neither he nor anybody else can invent canons of credibility. Each case must be judged by itself and by each man for himself. Indeed he recognises that, for his very last words are, 'Those who study the extant records 'of miracles with due attention will *judge for themselves* how far it has been supplied' (p. 139). And so, after all these suggestions of raising imaginary dead men, of centaurs, and of Mahometan superstitions, and his own dogma that proof of a miracle is impossible in the nature of things, we end where most men of common sense began long ago, that we must judge for ourselves how far sufficiently complete and weighty

evidence for the New Testament miracles has been supplied.

He is quite right in saying that 'if such evidence is needed at the present time for the occurrence of such a wonder as has been supposed, *it has always been needful.*' I suppose he means such a wonder as any of the miracles, or at any rate, such as the resurrection, which he had been last speaking of before he paralleled it with the earthquake of Jellalabad, which this sentence follows. And I now propose to inquire, in a very general way only, because the whole of celebrated books have been filled with that inquiry in detail, how far the proper conditions for 'complete and weighty evidence' of the miracles has been satisfied. Fortunately Hume and Huxley have prescribed their own conditions; otherwise I should have despaired of inventing any, as I should certainly have been accused of inventing them for the purpose of their being satisfied, which would make them worthless as an argument against unbelievers. I too leave every one to judge for himself whether these conditions were invented and adopted by the two philosophers for the purpose of being impossible to satisfy.

Conditions for Credibility of Evidence for Miracles.

Though Dr. Huxley has no hesitation, as we have seen, in contradicting Hume's fundamental proposition and condemns it as illogical, he straightway adopts

his conclusion, and attributes to him 'the authority 'of a historical specialist,' in asserting 'that there is 'not to be found in all history any miracle attested 'by a sufficient number of men of such unquestioned 'goodness, education, and learning, as to secure us 'against all delusion in [the men] themselves; of such 'undoubted integrity as to place them beyond all suspicion of any design to deceive others; of such credit 'and reputation in the eyes of mankind as to have a 'great deal to lose in case of their being detected in 'any falsehood; and at the same time attesting facts 'performed in such a public manner, and in so celebrated a part of the world, as to render detection 'unavoidable: all which circumstances are requisite 'to give us a full assurance of the testimony of men' (p. 137).

By way of giving more solemnity to this code of supposed impossible conditions, Dr. Huxley adds his own dictum, that 'Hume's assertions will be least 'challenged by those who have made it their business 'to weigh evidence and to give their decision under a 'due sense of moral responsibility': which is a tolerably modest assumption of superior capacity for weighing evidence, and a superior sense of moral responsibility in modern infidels and atheists over the great men of all ages and professions who have weighed the evidence a great deal more than he has, and come to the opposite conclusion. But we are used to that from his school, who always treat the rest of the world as fools, or something worse. Nevertheless we will see whether these

conditions are so fatal to the miracles as they suppose ; and let us apply them at once to what is always considered the greatest and the most impossible of them all, the resurrection of Christ after a real death. But for the resurrection, no man would ever have dreamed of doubting the reality of the death, as Dr. Huxley professes to do ; which was not only entirely unmiraculous and natural, but inevitable and certain in the circumstances recorded, as already explained. The 'historical specialist' himself selected it as his test miracle, saying, 'It is a miracle that a dead man should come to life,' and expressed no doubt about the death. Dr. Huxley may be right or wrong in finding fault with Hume's reason for calling it a miracle ; but his objection would have applied just as much to any other miracle that might have been selected, and therefore it is immaterial at present ; especially as every man of common sense knows that Hume was perfectly right in saying that any real resurrection is *ipso facto* miraculous without further proof, and that the only arguable question is its reality.

First then, was it 'attested by a sufficient number ' of men of such unquestioned goodness, education and ' learning, as to secure us against all delusion in [the ' men] themselves' ? The education and learning are manifestly thrown in to make sure of an apparent impossibility at once. But that little device is a failure ; for it does not want much of those articles to recognise a friend whom you have known as well as the apostles and disciples knew Jesus, who had only been removed

from them in the grave two days before he met and talked with some of them again. There remains the 'unquestioned goodness.' Well, who has ever questioned it? And if it means specially 'veracity,' who ever gave such proofs of their veracity as those early Christians, who had either seen Christ risen themselves, or were as well convinced by those who had as if they had themselves seen him, and were all ready to die for their conviction, and hundreds of them did?

Going further back, were they 'a sufficient number' of witnesses? If they were not, no conceivable number would be; for the sufficiency of the number, as soon as it is anything considerable, depends on their probable veracity in the circumstances, and that I spoke of just now. No crowd of careless, ignorant spectators, rather disposed to believe that they saw a particular phenomenon, of which they hardly knew the improbability themselves, would improve the evidence, or would be enough to convince careful and intelligent men of something monstrously improbable. But granting that the disciples would be very glad to see Christ risen, they would know the absolute impossibility of it as a natural event, and therefore would be slow to believe it. And if it was not real, who was it that they took for Jesus when he twice appeared among them, 'the doors being shut for fear of the Jews?' It must have been somebody very like him in appearance, voice, and manner, which we may safely assume to have been unique; and moreover with the 'stigmata' of the very recent wounds conspicuous: a combination so infinitely

improbable that it may be pronounced impossible. And the idea of numbers of people suffering martyrdom rather than give up their conviction about a doubtful identity, is absurd beyond measure. They must all have been very sure indeed, and no mere careless and ignorant crowd willing to be pleasantly deceived.

And how many were they? According to the history 'above five hundred brethren' on one occasion, besides sundry others on probably many different occasions during the forty days between the resurrection and that mysterious disappearance again, called the Ascension, which unbelievers have also to explain away somehow. It is true we have not the direct evidence of the five hundred now, but only second-hand evidence of that particular number having seen him (1 Cor. xv. 6), and therefore we are only logically entitled to say that he was quite certainly seen alive by a sufficient number of witnesses to convince gradually an unwilling and persecuting world that he rose from the dead; and that they did so by their number and their moral character (which their enemies constantly admitted) and their persistency in the face of persecutions which would have trodden out anything but truth.

Though Dr. Huxley's is by no means a new theory, it is remarkable that the only known record of any contemporary doubt about the identity of the risen Christ is that of the evangelists themselves, that 'some doubted,' and Thomas specifically, till they actually saw him. A very few persistent doubters after seeing him would have been immediately made the

most of by the 'unbelieving Jews,' and then by the Romans and the world. The apostate and acute Julian would not have failed to make use of it; nor Marcus Aurelius, the favourite philosopher of modern infidels, and one of the worst persecutors of Christians, and the writer of the dullest 'Moral Philosophy' in the world; which some people try to magnify, but which never influenced the conduct of any human being.

Hume's next demand is for 'undoubted integrity, so 'as to place the witnesses beyond all suspicion of any 'design to deceive others.' The answer to that is included in what I said of the demand for 'unquestioned goodness,' for I do not know how that differs from 'integrity.' But of course the object is to insinuate that those witnesses must have had a desire to deceive others, whether deluded themselves or not. Let us suppose that at first they had, though even then they had nothing to gain by it, except the satisfaction in their leader's success, which they as his followers would share, so that the Christian party would become of consequence. But if they had any such vision it was very soon dissipated, and they found that all they had to gain was the loss of everything in this world, including their lives, very often with tortures worse than death. The idea of deceivers going on deceiving in order to ensure to themselves nothing but that, is too absurd for anybody except unbelievers to believe.

The witnesses, say Hume and Huxley, must also be 'of such credit and reputation in the eyes of mankind 'as to have a great deal to lose if they were detected

‘in any falsehood.’ That is a mistake of another kind. Men of no credit or reputation in the eyes of the world are just as anxious to save their lives as men of the highest credit, and generally more so. Men of some consequence have allowed themselves to be killed occasionally for the sake of their families and the reputation they had to leave; but the idea of a set of common men of the rank of most of the disciples suffering martyrdom for a lie, because they thought their posthumous reputation would somehow gain by it, is absurd, and contrary to all experience; which Hume himself calls miraculous. He has here overshot his mark and damaged his case by propounding a test which he thought must be fatal to Christianity on the face of it, considering the small reputation of the first Christians; but unfortunately it logically tells the other way. The apostles however, as distinguished from the more unknown disciples, ‘had a great deal to lose’ if they were detected in any falsehood; and they were certain to be detected if there was one in such an improbable story as the resurrection. They would indeed have kept their lives, but would have sunk into utter contempt as impostors, both among their own followers and the rest of the world.

Hume and Huxley finally require that ‘the facts attested shall have been performed in such a public manner and in so celebrated a part of the world as to render detection unavoidable’—if there was any fraud to detect. St. Paul anticipated them in that, when he declared publicly and without contradiction, that ‘none

'of these things were hidden from King Agrippa,' who was 'expert in all questions among the Jews,' 'for this 'was not done in a corner' (Acts xxvi. 3, 26). And whether Agrippa's interrupting answer can be sensibly translated in any but the Authorised way or not,* both that and his conclusion in favour of Paul's innocence imply anything but a contradiction of his statement, which was throughout an argument on the question, 'Why should it be thought incredible with you that 'God should raise the dead?' If there was any fraud in this case, plenty of the disciples could and certainly would have detected and revealed it before Paul's trial, for the reason given above, of the impossibility of finding a false Christ like enough in all things to the real and crucified one to take in a multitude of people several times who knew him very well. If the identity was even doubtful, it is impossible that many of those who saw him should not have talked to that effect, and the moment any such talk began the wonder would be more and more questioned, and the fraud could never have got well on to its legs, as we may say, especially as soon as it began to be tried by persecution. There is not a word of evidence anywhere that that was so. The apostles and St. Luke made no secret that there were those who 'thought it incredible that God should 'raise the dead,' as an abstract proposition; but nobody in those days suggested that they had passed off a false Christ for a real one, or that the real one had never

* None is sensible which does not give force to the interruption at the very beginning of a new argument.

been dead; which would have been the instant and continual answer to all preaching of a sham resurrection; and must have been replied to and refuted by the apostles, or their case was gone.

Such were Hume's conditions for the credibility of the great individual miracles such as the Resurrection; for they are inapplicable to the previous daily miracles which produced their effect at the time, and are only known now by the general record of them and their results. He took upon himself to assert, and his follower agrees with him, but both of them do nothing more than assert, that those conditions have not been satisfied. Yet which of them can any arguer about them in detail make out to be unsatisfied, though Hume had the advantage of inventing them to suit his own purpose, and Dr. Huxley evidently thinks them well adapted for it?

Suppose now for a moment that he is right as to Christ not having been really killed by all that he suffered at the time when he is generally supposed, even by heathen and Jewish writers, to have died. What is the theory for getting rid of him at the time when all Christians suppose him to have ascended up to heaven—when one writer of some note is silly enough to ask what became of his clothes? 'Is not the body more than raiment?' Probably the infidel theory to explain how Jesus was made away with is something equally silly. It is no use guessing at such things, and therefore I can only say that his disappearance in a few weeks after his

disciples were rejoicing over his reappearance from the grave, without the smallest intimation from anybody of foul play, requires some more rational explanation than merely foolish derision of it as a thing impossible and absurd. Of course it is impossible and absurd if none of the previous miracles took place which convinced and converted the world; but if they did, the Ascension was not only possible and credible, but was the natural end of the earthly life of the person who could do all those things.

It is a favourite saying of unbelievers now, though not in early times, that we believe the miracles now because of Christianity, while Christianity was at first believed because of miracles—apparent and not real, of course they mean. And they call that reasoning in a circle, first proving Christianity by the miracles, and then the miracles by Christianity. But that is only another of their verbal fallacies. If it meant 'first' and 'then' in the order of reasoning, it would be reasoning in a circle. But 'first' means when Christianity had first to be proved to the conviction of a hostile world, and 'then' means 'now,' nearly 1900 years after, when all the original witnesses have perished, and the only surviving records of the details of the miracles are the writings of some of the eye-witnesses and their companions. That makes a different argument of it altogether. If there were only one such record, just enough to keep out the increasing errors which always accompany mere tradition, it would have been sufficient, with the other unquestionable history

and visible consequences all over the world, of the original reception of the miracles; which infinitely exceed the visible consequences of any events that ever happened long ago, or even of such great and recent ones as the conquests of Napoleon early in this century, and covering nearly all Europe. It would be impossible for the cleverest inventor of history, *ex post facto*, to deduce backwards from the present state of Europe, without the aid of history and tradition, that any such events happened about eighty years ago.

But from the present state of the world, with only the help of the New Testament records to keep the details right, and free from the corruptions now called 'developments,' which mean new doctrines invented by certain men from time to time, it is impossible not to deduce the fact, or (as Dr. Huxley happily calls the similar process in science) to 'prophecy backwards,' that the miracles had evidence at first which a hostile world found irresistible, and which has been more and more widely believed as civilisation has advanced. For Christianity is, *ipso facto*, the belief in the three great miracles of the Nativity, the Resurrection, and the Ascension—if Jesus Christ knew his own religion, which at least must be conceded.* Yet some persons choose to call themselves Christians who believe in none of them—'nor in anything else, except matter and themselves,' as was well said by a very able and not

* Here and elsewhere I may refer to Dr. Salmon's 'Non-Miraculous Christianity,' a volume full of admirable reasoning worthy of a mathematical theologian, as Paley also was, whom many persons now do not know to have been Senior Wrangler.

particularly religious writer lately. They might just as reasonably call themselves Mahometans, because—or if—they believe in one God, which it is by no means clear that many of them do.

Some who really believe that they are Christians and believers in the Trinity think to convert infidels by not insisting upon miracles; 'if people do not like them 'they can take Christianity without them.' They do not see that that is not converting infidels to Christianity but Christianity to infidelity. In like manner some people are for making the Church 'more comprehensive, 'elastic, liberal,' and sundry other nice things, by giving up every doctrine which any considerable number of people disbelieve. The only logical result of that process is to make the Church the World at once, by giving up every doctrine of the New Testament, and of course that book itself. For if there were no miracles, it is false from the first chapter to the last. On the other hand, if the miracles took place, it is true. Besides those alternatives there is no other.

Therefore also the Christian miracles stand on a much higher footing than many of the Old Testament, which are mostly independent stories, with no visible consequences of them remaining now, whereas Christianity is inexplicable by any rational theory, or any theory accepted by any ten persons of note, except the simple one that the miracles occurred. But that remark does not apply to the Old Testament *prophecies*; of the truth of which there is evidence now, or has been in history already, as has been shown in many

books. And it must be remembered that every true prophecy which could not have been made by any natural means was necessarily supernatural, or a violation of the laws of nature, just as much as walking on the sea or going up to heaven is a violation of the most universal and longest known law of nature, gravity: which, according to some old eastern saying, 'never sleeps.'

If it is necessary to answer once more the old objection, that, as many absurd and impossible religions exist to this day, the existence of a religion is no proof of its truth, the sufficient answer is, that not one of them does, or ever did, profess to be founded on miracles of which there is the smallest evidence. Mahomet wisely did not pretend to do miracles. Even Popery does not profess to prove itself by miracles. Papists use their miracles to impress ignorant or credulous people in a general way; but they are of no use to convince anybody else worth speaking of that Popery is true and Protestant Christianity is not, which is what they ought to prove; and I have already spoken of the character and evidence of their miracles. If any one should say that their most peculiar doctrine, Transubstantiation, is a miracle, I answer, Not *is*, but *would be*, if it could be proved; but where is the proof? The essence of all credible miracles is that they should be proved, and with unusually strong evidence; and for this there is no pretence of any, but entirely the contrary. So far Hume and Huxley are right: where they become wrong is in

dogmatically adding that no evidence can be strong enough. Strong enough to do what? Why, to convince competent judges. But the evidence for the New Testament miracles has convinced competent judges innumerable in all ages, and there is no pretence of any new evidence the other way. Those who now deny them have resolved *a priori* on other grounds that nothing shall convince them, *i.e.* that miracles cannot possibly be true. What they have got to do then is to invent a theory, agreed on by any dozen of their 'thinkers' (as they call them), which will rationally account for the indisputable history of Christianity up to now, consistently with the miracles being false, for that is the only alternative now open. They have never done that yet, any more than they have invented and agreed on any complete working theory of cosmogony, by evolution or otherwise, without the help of a Creator: indeed not one has been intelligibly propounded by any of them. If it has I shall be glad to learn where it is to be found.

Experience and the Laws of Nature.

We have yet to notice Hume's own statement of what I called his famous paradox to prove that miracles must be incredible. Here are his own words from the last edition of his works: 'A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature; and as a firm and unalterable experience has established those laws, the proof against a miracle from the very nature of the fact is as entire

'as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined.' And Dr. Huxley, as we saw at first, substantially adopts that dictum as to any real violation of the laws of nature, though he (wrongly) finds fault with Hume's definition of a miracle as being one. It is odd that neither of them perceived that Hume's plausible saying is nothing at all except either an unproved and unprovable dogma, or else a feeble platitude or truism. Nor did Renan, when he wrote (as I quote from Dr. Wace 'On the Gospel and its Witnesses'), 'The question of the supernatural is decided for us with perfect certainty by the single consideration that there is no room for believing a thing of which the world offers no experimental trace.'

It is not worth while to inquire what he means by an 'experimental trace;' for all these phrases are mere verbal tricks, involving the fallacy of using important words, first in one sense and then in another, quite inconsistent with it, and trusting that nobody will find it out. Possibly these conjurers have even deceived themselves. If the 'firm and unalterable experience' is meant to include the alleged miracles, it simply begs the question as to them; and if it means all *other* experience, it only says that each miracle is a miracle, and a violation of the laws of nature—*i.e.* of that course of nature or order of the universe by which the Maker of it is pleased to work whenever he does not depart from it; which is saying just nothing at all. Firm and unalterable experience has established the law of gravity, that every atom in the universe attracts

every other with a certain intensity and relation to the distance. Nobody imagines that the law of gravity ever has been or ever will be altered. But that has nothing to do with the question whether it has ever been supernaturally overcome in particular cases. We believe, no less than Hume and Huxley and Renan, that gravity was acting as usual all the time our Lord was walking on the sea, but that something else prevailed over it; because the evidence satisfies us that he did so walk, among many other miracles.

‘Firm and unalterable experience’ only tells us that a human body always sinks in water when nothing else interferes to hold it up; that diseases run a certain course by nature, and that no word spoken by any common man can cure them; that really dead bodies cannot be revived by any natural means; nor five loaves and two small fishes feed five thousand people; nor water be made wine by a word from any common man. It is not experience, but ignorance, and, we must add, conceit that they know everything, which men rely on when they say that there is no power in the universe strong enough to override those natural causes when it thinks fit. They only mean that they know of none. Such a power can only be proved by the results, for direct evidence of it is as impossible as Hume and Huxley say; but if the results are proved, the power is, wherever natural action of the requisite kind is impossible.

If the anti-miraculists ask how it happens that this power has never been known to act again in the last

1800 years, or, as Renan says, to leave no traces, we answer, that its action during those few first years of Christianity was proved by the results to be sufficient to do what the actors professed. The chief of them said constantly that the miracles were done to make men believe in him, *i.e.* that he was what he asserted; and his apostles said the same; and the miracles indisputably did that, or Christianity would not be here, and could never have prevailed over its difficulties; not even the moral philosophy of it; because it would then have had no more authority than any other of the multitude of 'moral philosophies,' which come and go and leave no sign behind. This argument assumes nothing *a priori* about the motives, or even the existence of God, but simply takes the facts as they are recorded and stare us in the face to this day in the prevalence of Christianity founded upon miracles and nothing else.

Those who refuse to believe miracles, and therefore any revelation, because they are sure that God would not have left it without continual proof of the same kind, assume exactly what they want. There has been continual proof enough to convince most of the wisest men in the world, and all the most civilised nations. It is true that there has not been enough to convince everybody; but I do not see what amount of evidence of supernatural action could possibly convince those who have decided for themselves that 'nature' includes everything that is, or has been, or ever will be. 'If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead,' is

even more clearly true now than when it was first said ; for one has risen from the dead, and yet they do not believe, only because they think he could not.

It is impossible to lay down any rules as to what the evidence must be to convince people in general of that or any other extraordinary and very improbable event ; nor would any one practically be influenced by any rule which he might have assented to in the abstract, as people often do too readily to all sorts of abstract rules and maxims, which are always invented for some argumentative purpose known to the inventors. Moreover, the number of witnesses of average veracity required, on the strictest mathematical principles, to turn the scale in favour of the most improbable event, which is not demonstrably impossible, is much less than most people imagine ; and it is idle to talk of miracles being demonstrably impossible without dogmatically assuming that there is no supernatural power. The late Charles Babbage had certainly no desire to exalt either miracles or Christianity, but rather to show that no apparent miracle need be considered miraculous ; which is also Dr. Huxley's theory ; his primary object was to illustrate some of the powers of his own calculating machine. In the second edition of what he chose to call a 'Ninth Bridgwater Treatise,' he showed by an easy mathematical calculation that the concurrent, unbiassed testimony of only twenty-five men (and in one view only thirteen) who tell the truth ten times as often as they lie, in matters of consequence enough to make them careful—not at all a high degree of veracity

—is enough to overweigh an antecedent probability of a billion (not a million) to one against the event they testify. For example, if we knew for certain that the sun has risen and set daily for about 274 million years, the probability that it will rise to-morrow is a billion to one, deduced from that experience. No theory that has yet been invented and generally accepted accounts for the sun having existed for anything like that time, and unquestionably we do not know it. And such calculations can take no account of the sharpening of the veracity of the twenty times twenty-five witnesses of the resurrection, by the fact I mentioned before, that they had a vast deal more to lose than to gain by it, which is one of Hume and Huxley's tests.

Therefore we come back to this, that unless the unbelieving philosophers can somehow prove miracles to be absolutely impossible, there has been far more than evidence enough to prove the greatest of them, even if there had not been a series of others before, all quite impossible under the known laws of nature ; and those were still more amply testified at the time, because they were known all over Jerusalem at least, and were the real cause of Jesus being put to death, unless the gospels are altogether false ; which then involves the still greater difficulties I have spoken of, and for which no rational explanation has ever been agreed on by any ten philosophers, if by any two, worth mentioning. Gibbon was the greatest (as science has not so much to do with it as history) who deliberately set himself to explain the history and present state of the world on

the hypothesis of the gospels being false ; and I suppose it is no exaggeration to say that not a single writer of eminence has ever agreed with him, or been more successful in obtaining followers himself. Lastly, then, let us consider the scientific grounds for asserting the

Impossibility of Miracles.

All the pretended proofs that any interference with the regular course of nature is impossible, amount to nothing more than experience that it never has been interfered with *except by miracles*. When Hume and Huxley talk of the 'evidence in favour of their view,' *that* is the evidence and the experience, and nothing more ; the rest is the question to be tried, not the evidence. And we have seen how Dr. Huxley himself condemns Hume for assuming that nothing can ever happen of which there was no experience before : and that assumes also that there never had been any miraculous experience before Christ, which neither Jews nor we admit. Some of the deniers of miracles 'boast themselves of the law' of 'induction,' as if that were any more than the inference that the laws of nature which we find to hold in all cases within our observation will hold in all others where the circumstances are the same ; *i.e.*, where no superior cause comes in to override any law of nature. The superior cause may either be another natural one, or for anything we can tell *a priori*, supernatural or miraculous, according to the universal understanding of those words, which

is better than any definition. That is all that induction has to do with the matter.

Moreover, every apparent miracle for which there was good evidence was a case within human observation and experience, and entitled to just as much weight in forming a conclusion about its cause as any other case. It would be so in the strictest scientific inquiry. If a single exceptional fact is certain, or supported by evidence which makes us feel certain, no general conclusion can stand which does not account for it. Science admits no such nonsense as that stupid saying, 'Exceptions prove the rule.' A law previously supposed to be the true universal one is condemned immediately as either wrong or imperfect by one obstinate fact, unless it can be explained by some superior intervening cause. The real experience from which we have to conclude by induction (if they like to say so), whether there are miracles or not, embraces those very abnormal events which nobody has yet been able to explain without supernatural interference. The experience from which unbelievers conclude that there is none, is only one-sided experience in quality, however large in quantity. But in science quantity goes for nothing towards proving an universal law against even one outstanding instance: much less against such a multitude of instances as convinced the world of Christianity, which it is mere idleness and absurdity to assume were all lies: for if they were, that leaves the establishment and existence of Christianity as great a miracle as any.

It is the fashion just now to parade the somewhat recently discovered law of the 'Conservation of Force,' or the constancy of the sum of all the forces in the universe, as a new demonstration of the impossibility of miracles, which, as far as we can see, would be a disturbance of it, except in miraculous prophecies of natural events. It seems to me a singularly bad one for several reasons. First of all, we cannot be sure that the sum of the forces in the universe was not 'conserved' in the miracles in some way that we have no idea of; and perhaps even the sum of all the matter in the universe, in such miracles as the multiplication of the loaves and fishes; not that I assume in either case that it was. As no one has the least idea of what physical process really took place in any miracle, such reasoning is of very little value either way. But let it be granted that the law of conservation of force was broken; how is that any greater violation of the laws of nature than the much more evident violation of the no less universal law of gravity by Christ's walking on the water, and still more by his Ascension? One law of nature is no more violable than another by anything short of supernatural power. But I suppose it is thought more imposing to talk of some newly discovered law of nature being fatal to miracles, than to rely on the old ones which are practically known to everybody; and its being difficult to prove the new one to ordinary persons makes it all the more imposing, but certainly not more logically valuable. I am not assuming that unbelievers admit that the law of gravity ever was broken in that way, but merely pointing out

that their case is not the ~~last~~ mended by bringing in another law of nature, which is, after all, more a matter of inference a great deal than that of gravity, and much less capable of universal demonstration. And when we find some of the leading automatic creationists, such as Haeckel and others, talking of the 'self-contained energy' of some imaginary atoms, and 'the inherent forces of self-existing matter,' it is evident that they do not let the conservation of force stand much in their way when they choose.*

All the declarations that the laws of nature *cannot* be broken plainly resolve themselves into the absurd dogma that there is no power in the universe strong enough to do so, although there must be some power strong enough to make and to maintain them, unless they made and maintain themselves; which necessarily means that every atom in the universe resolved from the beginning by universal suffrage how they should behave in all possible circumstances, and always keep and act on that resolution, as I have shown in the book just now referred to. Any man who can believe that is past arguing with; and any man who can show that automatic cosmogony does not mean that will himself be a prodigy. Again, a declaration that the laws of nature never *have been* broken by a Creator, who of course could break as easily as make them, is mere guessing that he could have no sufficient motive for it. But such guessing is useless and absurd in the face of the certain facts that the doers of the miracles

* See my 'Origin of Laws of Nature,' Second Edition, pp. 38, 63.

announced the motive, and the results proved that they were right. Their revelation could not possibly have got accepted without miracles, and it did get accepted by them. Surely that was motive enough.

There is one more objection to the possibility of miracles which I ought to notice, though it goes far beyond them, and therefore beyond the scope of this review. It is that no immaterial agent can act on matter, and therefore *a fortiori* not by special interference. Those who say so naturally treat force, whether self-existing or coming into existence once for all in some unknown way, as the prime cause of everything, *i.e.* of every motion of all the atoms of the universe which makes them what they are and has made them make all things. They add that nobody can form any idea of what force is, but that it is 'the ultimate of ultimates,' and many other awful things. Absurd as that is, for the moment be it so. Indeed it is not at all absurd to say that force is the cause of motion, for force only means either motion or pressure. But, may we ask, what is force then, but 'an immaterial agent which acts on matter' continually? And what else is the 'Spirit of God, which moved upon the face 'of the waters,' and caused the motions (of their atoms) which 'divided them' into sea and clouds—which 'spake by the prophets'—which made Jesus be born without a human father—by which he did the miracles, calling it 'the finger of God,' and saying that those who attributed them to Beelzebub committed blasphemy which should not be forgiven?

There are then only five possible hypotheses about this whole question. First, that the miracles were true and real: which at any rate solves every difficulty, and accounts for all the phænomena. Dr. Huxley may call that solution the result of 'the ingrained tendency of the human mind to suppose that a process is explained when it is ascribed to a power of which nothing is known except that it is the hypothetical agent of the process.'* But that is only a roundabout way of uttering the paradox, with a great pretence of philosophy, that when no natural cause for certain events is possible, it is 'absurd to ascribe them to a supernatural, of which we know nothing,' *except what we are told* by those who evidently produced the events somehow, and must have known how they did it. There is nothing absurd in that; but there is in pretending to know better than they did by what power they did those things, including the predicting and ordering of them; and in pronouncing that no such power ever acted, or perhaps exists, because we have no means of knowing anything about it except by its results and the aforesaid information.

The second possible hypothesis is, that the miraculous stories are altogether false; mere inventions of the evangelists: which is, no doubt, equally simple; but unfortunately it is a purely negative theory, and only explains one side of the history, which has to be *all* explained by any theory which claims to be true. It leaves the problem of the history and existence

* Professor Huxley's 'Science and Culture,' p. 334.

of Christianity all over the civilised world unsolved, and without any attempt at explanation of the still further difficulty of the evangelists inventing such a character as that of Jesus Christ, which has never been denied to be different from and superior to any other that has ever been described in either history or fiction. It is true that this would not be fatal to the theory that the miracles are false if they were proved to be absolutely impossible. The demonstrators of that impossibility would be entitled to stop there, and leave anybody else to account for the growth of Christianity as he can. But I have shown that no such demonstration has been given, or 'is possible 'in the nature of things,' as Dr. Huxley says of the converse proposition; it amounts, and can amount, to no more than improbability, which has to be weighed against all the difficulties of any opposite theory; and no theory that is not reconcileable with the history of the world can be true.

The third conceivable hypothesis is that the accounts of the so-called miracles are true as to the bare phenomena, but no more; and that again admits of two alternatives: one, that they were tricks or delusions of some kind, performed somehow by the persons who professed to order them, as conjurors do; and the other, which we will call the fourth theory, is that the miracles truly happened as natural events, but the words ordering them were either never uttered but invented afterwards; or else (fifth) that the uttering of them 'had no more to do with the results than any other

fortuitously coincident event,' as Dr. Huxley says (p. 138). I have already considered each of the last three hypotheses, and it seems unnecessary to say more of them than that, if there is any choice, the last seems the most ludicrous of all; and yet, strangely enough, that is the only one for which he expresses any preference, except so far as he concurs with Hume that the evidence for no recorded miracle satisfies his tests; but that belongs to the second of the above theories, and I have dealt with that sufficiently.

Moreover all the three last involve the difficulty of explaining how the principal doer of the apparent miracles can have had the exemplary moral character that is universally conceded to him, and yet have been the profound impostor that he must have been if they were not real. It is true that is a very old argument, and so, I dare say, are most of those that I have used, in some form or other. But it is necessary to remind some people that they are no worse for that, but better, if they have received no rational answer all this time. I do not know that these have received any answer, beyond a few scornful epithets, which conceited young men with a little practice can apply to anything, and some plausible analogies and dogmatic maxims which clever philosophers can easily invent and pass off for the latest revelations of science.

THE END.

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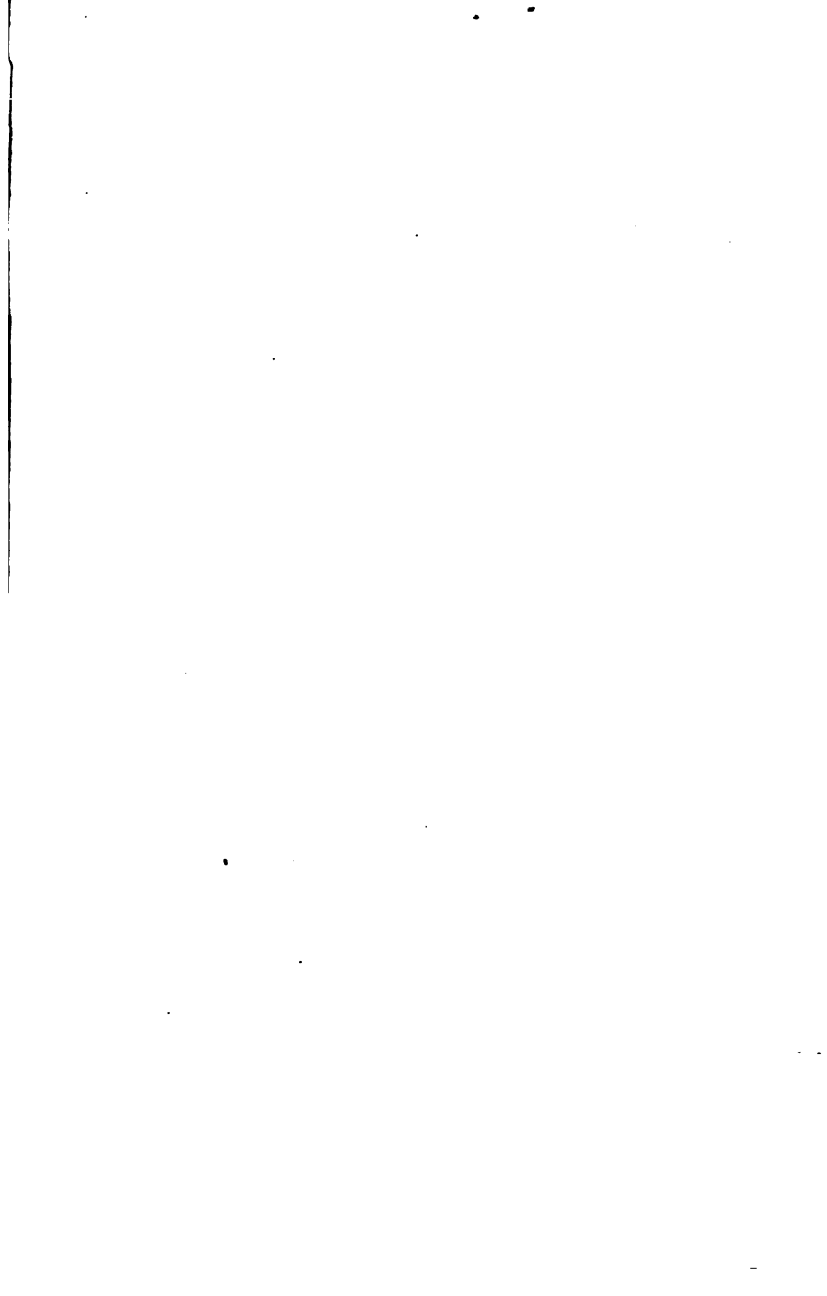
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